Maitland Regional Art Gallery director Joe Eisenberg makes an interesting subject for portraiture

By EMMA SWAIN   Jan. 22, 2015, 8:34 p.m.

As an art aficionado and cultural connoisseur Joe Eisenberg makes a rather vibrant subject for portraiture.

SIT STILL PLEASE: MRAG director Joe Eisenberg with artist Rachel Milne and her portrait in progress. Picture by CATH BOWEN

Not one to employ silence, the Maitland Regional Art Gallery director has all but chattered his way through a series of sittings that could lead to the 2015 Archibald Prize.

"Joe is quite entertaining to paint and he's also challenging, but his appearance is really, really interesting," artist Rachel Milne said.

"If this work is good enough, then I'm going to enter it in the Archibald Prize this year. I've got nothing to lose so why not?"

Earlier this year, the Hunter-based artist set up residency in the gallery to paint a daily self-portrait.

This time, Mr Eisenberg is her subject of choice.

"Rachel came to me with the idea of painting my portrait and I really like what she does," Mr Eisenberg said.

"But I also see the portrait as a way of representing Maitland. It may not be an image of a church, but it is of people's inner feelings of life in this city and I think it would just be a nice record to have."

But while Mr Eisenberg has been painted before, this was the first time he has sat for a local artist.

"This whole thing is a really interesting process. All the great portrait artists say the same thing and that the actual painting has nothing to do with likeness," Mr Eisenberg said.

"To be a good portrait artist you need to be able to capture that inner self and Rachel has the skill to get you out of you and that's hard to do."

Milne, 36, came to Australia from England two years ago and portraiture has claimed a special place in her heart.

"It's something about spending time with someone that adds so much more to the portrait," Milne said.

"You really get to know them and, personally, that's what I think makes a successful portrait."